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Chapter 11 How to develop your research interests

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We qualify as Counsellors, Psychotherapists or Chartered Clinical or Counselling Psychologists and develop our expertise as therapists with our primary interest being client benefit. We are also part of a profession which prizes its scientific credentials and the evidence base to our work. Yet, do we continue to regard evidence as central to our therapeutic practice or do we become embedded in a particular theoretical stance, ignoring contrary evidence? Do we, in practice, even eschew research altogether?

As a profession we argue that we need to re-examine our roles and activities given the emerging identities of ourselves and those we work with and the demand for evidence based practice (Drabick and Goldfried, 2000). As we have seen in the previous chapter on CPD, every practitioner will now engage with research either as a consumer, a participant or as a researcher themselves. This chapter is based on an assumption that we do continue to prize research and seek to inform our practice by undertaking our own research. However it will not be a treatise on how to undertake academic research nor will we repeat all the excellent textbooks available on methodologies and approaches. Instead we will look at issues for practitioners as they undertake research within their own practice. This is an equally rigorous and robust process but one which serves, more fully, the needs and aspirations of the practitioner.

Before we begin to develop a roadmap of how practitioners can approach research we will look at the underpinning debate around the scientist-practitioner model and the research paradigms available to us.

Why do research?

The scientist-practitioner model is one of a practitioner working scientifically, using validated methods of assessment and treatment where they exist, and where not, applying scientific principals to the individual case. This implies a mutual exchange between academic research in the field and professional practice. However there is a view that science has failed to inform practice. There has been a range of debate on the principal reasons for this but effectively it is one of scale. The scientist is concerned with the rigorously and objectively generic whilst the practitioner is dealing with the individual within their practice. Thus the perception is of each looking to different horizons and using different skill sets to get there.

However it is clear that separate camps for research and practice are no longer tenable. Dawes (1994) identifies that it is an element of professional responsibility for the

practitioner to actively seek out research evidence to inform their work and not rely instead on the dubious validity of professional experience. Thus it is not surprising that as the field of professional psychology grows the newer professional entities such as coaching psychologists etc are choosing the scientist-practitioner model as a basis of practice. Stoltenberg, Pace and Kashubeck-West (2000) claim the model provides a framework through which important scholarly and practice-based advances can continue to occur. They argue that psychologists cannot be competent in the delivery of their practice unless they know how to evaluate it. Conducting one's own research is an essential precursor to understanding and utilizing the published research literature in an informed way.

In a similar vein, Belar and Perry (1992) propose that the scientist-practitioner model provides an invaluable framework for theory-building whereby, through a systematic approach to enquiry, random observations can be shaped into hypotheses that can presage the development of new theories and interventions which have substantive implications for professional practice. They argue that the influence of science is not always instantaneous but does shape how psychologists work.

Thus the scientist-practitioner model can be seen as integrating the three, complementary roles of; practitioner, consumer of research and producer of research (Crane and McArthur Hafen, 2002). As Lane and Corrie (2006) argue, this is not the same as the evidence-based practitioner whose role is one of implementing specific interventions and consuming research to stay up to date. The scientist practitioner is more participatory and is concerned with integrating both the consumption and production of research in practice with a distinct professional identity.

That participation also informs the model of science which is appropriate for practice-led enquiry. For example, Counselling Psychology has actively promoted alternatives to the narrow definitions of science. Van Duerzen-Smith (1990), suggests that psychology has traditionally organized itself around discovering objective facts rather than exploring what it means to be human, with all the dilemmas and choices that this entails. For her, psychology needs to embrace more fully its artistic and dialogic dimensions over and above its preoccupation with what she sees as overly narrow scientific principles. As a discipline strongly connected with humanistic values and principles, counseling psychology argues for a scientist-practitioner model that is practice-led, phenomenologically-focused, respectful of diversity and interested in the uncovering of subjective truths (Woolfe and Dryden, 1996).

In summary it is now regarded as good practice for practitioners to be engaged in research and audit – evaluation, research, development or more generally inquiry. Through this engagement the practitioner can access and integrate knowledge from their clinical practice with that from research to achieve a real sustainability of practice where they are able to function within diverse environments and handle significant ambiguity.

But is there anything unique about practitioner research or is it simply a scaled down version of academic research? You, as a practitioner, will be bringing your practice to the

research so the generic model of 'research' as meaning a sterile, objective and disconnected activity, undertaken as separate from practice, is not appropriate. The practitioner researcher (or what Lane and Corrie, 2006, term the modern scientist-practitioner) is in the thick of it getting their hands dirty. The model of science which will be used will be very different and it is this which we will consider next.

What's different about Practitioner Research?

Research has traditionally been associated with a type of knowledge production known as Mode 1. It was epitomized by a researcher working within a single discipline looking at an issue isolated from its economic, social and political context. Often nicknamed 'curiosity-led research' this type of research did not have to relate directly to practice in the belief that through 'development' work a use might evolve for it in the future. Nowadays there is a universal requirement to identify a return on investment and research has not been immune to this driver. The consequence has been a move to Mode 2 working where the potential application of the research to practice is considered at the very start of the work. These 'real world' questions will often require transdisciplinary working with others and will need to take into account a range of stakeholders (Gibbons et al 1994,). Practitioner research is by definition 'issue-led research' and as such sits very neatly as a Mode 2 type of activity. Indeed Mcleod (Mcleod, 1999) defines practitioner research as

'research carried out by practitioners for the purpose of advancing their own practice;

There are two important elements to this definition

- (1) the activity is controlled by the practitioner and the research is conducted by them with their own constructs and
- (2) the researcher is explicit about its purpose i.e. the research is embedded within practice addressing an issue of practice.

There are certain general characteristics of practitioner research (Shaw, 2003)

- The research questions, aims and outcomes are determined by the practitioners themselves.
- The research is usually designed to have a benefit or an impact which is immediate and direct.
- It focuses on the professional's own practice and/or that of their immediate peers.
- It is small scale and short term.
- Usually it will be self-contained, and not part of a larger research programme.
- Data collection and management is typically carried out as a lone activity.
- It is one kind of 'own account research'.
- The focus is not restricted. While it will commonly be evaluative, it may be descriptive, developmental or analytical.

When you are considering your own research it is clear that the overall size and content of the research has to be appropriate to you as the practitioner i.e. something which can be undertaken and managed whilst working in practice. It is one of the main challenges for any practitioner researcher to keep the scale of their enquiry appropriate to their time

and resources.

Striving for Integrity in the Research Process

It is when you research that you are effectively putting your theoretical basis forward and deciding to review it. This makes it, in effect, a deeply personal experience and reflexivity becomes an important consideration for the would-be researcher.

Within the positivistic tradition which dominated quantitative research for so long researchers strove for detached indifference to their research. This is a paradigm which sits well within Mode 1 working but as our previous discussion illustrates it does not sit well with Mode 2.

The researcher and the practitioner are two modes of working which cannot be completely separated – your beliefs, values and knowledge about your practice will influence how you view events and your role. If we take a constructionist or critical realist view of knowledge (as we discuss later) i.e. we believe that knowledge is relative to the perspective from which it is viewed, then it is clear that the researcher/practitioner must take their ‘view’ into account when considering their research.

Research Paradigms – Identifying Your World View

The ‘view’ of the researcher will influence everything from the choice of research question to the methodology employed to explore it. It is effectively the paradigm under which the research activity will take place. In a real sense this research paradigm will determine the whole framework of the research.

We will take a short exploration of paradigms here with particular reference to the practitioner researcher. A first point of reference for this exploration is to identify the type of research which you are considering.

Is it based upon:

- Developing a broad knowledge base that is (hypothetically) universal and generalisable.
- Optimizing effective practice through ‘standardizing’ aspects of technical delivery (such as developing treatment manuals).
- Justifying the use of a particular practice by demonstrating its effectiveness.

Such issues are underpinned by a view that that reality (truth) exists independently of us. Researchers are required to apply the right process and the answers will be revealed. Thus they are empirically bounded relying upon two assumptions. The first is that scientific observation is neutral. The second is that knowledge of the world becomes more robust according to the extent to which scientists agree and are able to generalize their findings.

While it is often assumed that this is the “best” way to do research it can be problematic because the phenomena of interest to us are frequently dilemmas, values, choices and

relationships. This approach also fails to take account of the realities of practice, where innovations and improvisations are common. Although favoured academically it may be less well suited to the client practice level. For the practitioner, the pursuit of truth is less informative than the pursuit of knowledge that is practical.

An alternative to the empirical approach to research and one that is now frequently used is the idea of evidence based practice, or the “What Works School”, which is founded on the concept of falsification. In its more recent variants (Lakatos 1973, 1976) it is concerned with processes that answer such questions as:

- What are the relative merits of each competing theory in the context of a given enquiry (in terms of the extent to which they are falsifiable)?
- What are my own criteria of falsifiability (that is, what are my own individual theoretical preferences and at what point would I be prepared to reject them)?
- What are the criteria against which I assess the validity of my hunches, intuition and spontaneous actions?
- What are the factors (personal assumptions, people, situations and work contexts) that have led me to reject certain ideas in favour of others?

It is useful, for example, in exploring the assumptions that underpin a particular service provision (for example the use of a Cognitive Behavioural approach to the treatment of depression in a clinical setting) where we can explore the strengths and limitation of the theory to the setting.

What is appealing about this approach for the practitioner researcher is that it creates a place for intuition, creativity and improvisation and provides a framework for their systematic use. Within this framework any theory can be admitted to conjecturing, as long as the circumstances in which we would be prepared to relinquish it are clearly specified. It places a priority on

- (1) working with the best theories available (rather than aiming to uncover universal or generalisable findings);
- (2) ensuring best practice by working towards continual refinement of existing theories and
- (3) continually refining theory through generating conjectures that can be shaped into falsifiable hypotheses for rigorous testing.

However, in a critique of empiricist approaches to research Thomas Kuhn (1970). argued that while this all seems very rational, in reality scientists, just like practitioners, look for evidence which confirms, not disconfirms, their hypothesis. We are disinclined to test and reject favoured ideas (paradigms) in the way that the falsification position suggests.

In the light of a Kuhnian story about science, we would be concerned in shaping our research agenda with questions such as:

- In which paradigm(s) was I trained?
- Which paradigms are most influential in my practice now? How have I got here?

- To what 'community of scientists' (in a broad sense) do I currently belong?
- What types of reasoning, formulation, creativity and intervention does this paradigm encourage and discourage? And most particularly:
- Given that different paradigms emphasise different questions, how would the nature of my research enquiries change if I switched paradigm?

This helps us to guard against using research to perpetuate an existing frame of practice.

In an even more fundamental critique, the concept of an objective reality to be uncovered through research is rejected within this paradigm. If we were to argue that there is no such thing as an objective reality then we must remain sceptical about any form of knowledge that purports to uncover it. This position, advocated by social constructionism, is a radical philosophical challenge to the empiricist worldview and to research based upon it. (see Burr, 1995; Gergen, 1985, 1992 for an overview).

From this perspective we might argue:

- (1) that all knowledge is historically, culturally and socially embedded;
- (2) that what we regard as truth or reality is, in fact, the product of on-going social exchanges through which meanings are communicated, negotiated and co-constructed and
- (3) that different types of social exchange predispose us towards certain types of action over others (Burr, 1995).

Implicit in this worldview is the belief that there are no 'facts' which exist apart from our constructions of them; truth becomes relative, and no single perspective (including a scientific one) can have greater validity than any other.

If we were to adopt this view we would seek a research process that helps us develop:

- A fuller appreciation of how social and political discourses lead us to regard certain types of knowledge as more rigorous than others.
- Greater understanding of how we have been enabled and constrained in our work by the dominant (empiricist) discourse about science.
- A more detailed understanding of how we innovate and intervene through gathering practitioners' 'common sense' accounts.
- Knowledge of 'common assumptions' about professional practice that guide our actions.

This approach places a premium on our reflexivity which includes self-criticism and this alerts us to the human subjective processes involved in undertaking research; that is - knowledge is relative to their own perspective (Potter and Wetherall, 1987; Edwards and Potter, 1992).

An alternative critique has been posed by Roy Bhaskar (1975, 1979) and Manicas and Secord (1983) and has led to a story about science termed 'critical realism.'

Like social constructionism, critical realism recognises that knowledge is a product of historical

and social processes and that discourse plays a central role in shaping human reality. However, critical realism (as opposed to the naïve realism of the empiricist worldview) proposes that our experience of the world is based on the interaction of many systems including those that exist independently of our discursive constructions of them. In other words, there is a social reality which exists independently of discourse. This world comprises substantive underlying structures against which any socially constructed reality must be negotiated.

If there are realities which exist apart from socially-embedded discourse, and which shape our experiences and actions, then we need a way to investigate them. This transforms the task of science into one of inventing theories that aim to represent the world. As Manicas and Secord suggest, 'Sciences generate their own rational criteria in terms of which theory is accepted or rejected and can be deemed to be rational because there is a world that exists independently of our ability to know it' (1983: 401).

In addition to the issues raised by social constructionism, questions through which we critique our practice and our research upon it would include:

- As agents of change, how do we go about engineering desirable outcomes in our work?
- What tools, strategies and interventions do we need to achieve them?
- What are the external factors that we need to take into account to maximize the chances of engineering a preferred outcome (including any practical constraints of time, money or context)?
- What are the ways in which different types of professional intervention enable or constrain the self-interventions of our clients?

Adopting this perspective would lead to research processes which would have the potential to fundamentally change the nature of our practice.

The research paradigm you choose will be the one which is more congruent with your beliefs, values and practice therefore it is not so much a choice as recognition of the 'view' that you are bringing to your research. However, once identified, it will provide a framework for the entire activity. Such a framework can be particularly useful for when we research we are stepping into the unknown, asking a question which has not been answered before. There may be an expected view of what answers the research will uncover but it will not be certain. Some practitioners find this exciting but all will appreciate that sitting with this level of uncertainty can be challenging.

It is at this point that having a road map for the process of practitioner research can hold the ambiguity at bay and we will consider this next. Such a road map can provide structure for your research by identifying how research happens and what the essential elements are and when they should be addressed. Some practitioners may feel that this is too constricting but that would be too limited a view. Such a road map should not constrain choice of methodology, analysis or approach- it should facilitate fuller exploration of these by providing a design for the overall activity.

A Roadmap for Research

In thinking about research, we have found it helpful to organize our reasoning skills around three domains. These reflect the creation of understanding in clinical practice (Lane and Corrie, 2006) but as applied to research of practice. We would see these as relevant to psychological practice across all areas of application. These are: (1) Purpose; (2) Perspective and (3) Process.

1) Purpose – what do you want to achieve, who for and why?

‘He who stands on tiptoe does not stand firm’ (Lao-Tzu; 500 BCE translation 1989)

In undertaking any psychological enquiry, it is vital to be clear about its fundamental purpose. The shape that your enquiry subsequently takes and the stories you tell about that enquiry will follow on from here. Therefore, the starting point is a shared learning journey between you and the stakeholders for your research and begins as you define the purpose of your work together. This gives rise to the following questions:

- *What are you setting out to achieve (you might call it, outputs, results, processes of change, relationship, or journey)? How do you explain this; what is the story you seek to tell that gives rise to the research?*
- *Is that story seeking to demonstrate a relationship between events (traditionally to prove or dis-prove a relationship) or is the story about exploring a relationship, one of understanding or action?*
- *What is the value of the research to the stakeholder? What is their purpose in engaging in this encounter with you, here and now? What do you need to do to make it possible for stakeholders to tell their story, to feel heard in the research?*
- *What type of client purpose is served by your research?*
- *What boundaries do you place on the purpose of the research that would not be consistent with a practitioner researcher stance?*

There is one essential task in this section but it will take a significant part of your time as a researcher to achieve it and that task is developing your research question.

a) Develop your research question

The research question is the hub and anchor of all the activity within the research. It informs what methodology is appropriate and what data should be collected. You will actively return to it repeatedly throughout the research to check that the research is on the right track. A poorly defined question will spread confusion and leave you lost within the activity.

The research question will again be;

- Informed by the researcher’s paradigm as identified above.
- Explicitly informed by the practice of the practitioner. A characteristic of work

based research in general and practitioner research specifically is that it will draw out the knowledge that is tacit within your practice and make it explicit

- Must be an area you are passionate about. It will represent significant investment in time and resources you will need this passion to sustain you.
- It must be tractable i.e. it can be answered by research.
- Not so broad that it will take a lifetime to answer it
- But of sufficient depth to warrant research.
- Tempered by identification of the constraints you are working under in terms of 'bounded rationality'. A researcher –practitioner will often have to be content with the sufficient in terms of a research element instead of the optimum.
- Inclusive of stakeholders views

The question must be specific, concise and well defined so that all participants and stakeholders are agreed upon it. This is often not a trivial task. An example may be of help here.

If one was to ask:

Does coaching improve the performance of executives?

Then, assuming we are agreed on what constitutes coaching, there are still two words which have a variety meanings depending upon your perspective – these are 'improve' and 'performance'.

From the perspective of a HR professional who is a stakeholder 'improved performance' may mean

a) increase in scores on 360 degree feedback,

For the manager of the coachee it may mean

b) 10% increase in sales.

And from the viewpoint of the coach it may be

c) Perceived satisfaction from the coachee that they have addressed certain issues which were designed to improve performance.

Obviously the question needs to be more specific and the terms 'success' and 'performance' need to be strictly defined for the research.

Whilst reflecting upon the research question it is also necessary to find out about the issue you are interested in. Researchers will often either assume no one has ever asked their question before and miss valuable information; or assume their question has already been answered and perpetuate a false premise. The researcher should always carry out some desk work to find out about their issue – what have others identified, do they share similar views upon the subject of the enquiry, What is already known? Does it speak to my question? Does it inform my question? This 'literature review' will be a piece of desk research in its own right. But whilst reading, and critically analysing what is read, you will find your research question will evolve and develop to become honed and fit for purpose. A word of caution at this point is that many researchers find it difficult to hone down the

question as they discover many tantalising side issues and alternative viewpoints. It can seem overwhelming! It is at this point that critical friends become important.

b) Recruit critical friends who will provide the 'grit for the oyster'. Within academic research the researcher will spend a significant time in critical analysis of their research plans with colleagues and collaborators producing a planning document or research proposal detailing exactly what the enquiry is about, why it is important, how it is to be conducted etc. Within the proactive practice context there is a tendency to side track this process and the research then suffers from not having a thorough grounding. Critical friends or collaborators are essential for the development of a robust research plan. They will remind you of your limitations and identify when you are being waylaid by interesting side lines away from your research question.

c) Engagement with other stakeholders is also critical at this stage. The research may be undertaken purely for interest by the practitioner but there will always be other stakeholders who will have an interest in the activity. Clear identification of stakeholders and their particular needs will enhance and develop the form of the research. They will bring other perspectives to the research and we will deal with these explicitly when we discuss ethics in the next section.

2) Perspective – how you are going to do it and why?

We have identified that the way you will have framed your research question will be heavily influenced by your own beliefs in respect to your practice and what is your dominant research paradigm. This influence will carry through to your choice of route for getting the information to address your inquiry – your research methodology. There are a great many texts looking at research methodologies in the social sciences and we list a number of texts which are helpful to the practitioner below. These books provide a thorough listing of the available methodologies and the corresponding approaches and techniques. Several approaches, such as action research and soft systems methodology, are well suited for the 'insider' researcher who is fully aware of their organisation or practice issues. The insider knowledge of the research practitioner can place them at an advantage over the external researcher. But as identified before the researcher must also guard against subjectivity working against their inquiry.

It seems a truism to say the choice of research approach is dependent upon the question but novice researchers often find the choice difficult as they are still 'looking for the right answer'. If the research question is specific and well constructed then the approach will often follow:

Going back to our example:

It is clear that in (a) and (b) a quasi-experimental design can be used in which a group of executives are coached and their 360 assessments or sales figures compared before and after coaching. There will be a large number of variables to be considered such as length

of coaching and the coaching process but a literature review may identify the relative ranking of these variables and their corresponding influence thus allow them to be controlled.

In (c) the enquiry has more depth. The emphasis is on the coachee's perception of what has happened to them. In this enquiry a case study, focus group or survey can all be brought to bear depending upon the context and access to the individuals.

It is often the case with practitioner research that multiple tools will be used within the inquiry. For example you may want to use a questionnaire to obtain a viewpoint from a relatively large sample of people and then interview a sub-set of this sample to explore the information in more depth. At the same time you will be looking into the literature on the subject to see if any other researcher has found similar findings which can inform your study. This planned use of multiple techniques is an example of triangulation and enhances the validity of your findings. You are, in fact, seeking as many perspectives on the issue under investigation as possible and identifying any commonality. In other inquiries the researcher may not be interested in the commonality of experience but just that of the individual so will only conduct in-depth case studies.

We have already explored how the perspective of the researcher can determine the dominant research paradigm but there are also the other participants within the research to consider. Your stakeholders or research subjects (clients) also bring perspectives of their own which will inform your work together and which must, therefore, be given equal consideration in the enquiry that follows. Engaging with these perspectives gives rise to questions such as:

- On what sort of research journey are you and your client engaged?
- Some journeys proscribe certain routes (perspectives or methodologies). How do you ensure coherence between your and your client's journey?
- What are the values, beliefs, knowledge and competences that you each bring to the encounter?
- What do you do to ensure that the client is able to explore their values, beliefs, knowledge and competence within the research encounter?

Working with and honouring these alternative perspectives is the realm of research ethics – an essential element of the whole practice of research. There are a range of ethical guidelines available to researcher practitioners (for example BPS) and the reader is strongly recommended to review their own Professional Body's guidelines. Obviously clinical research is bounded by the local Board of Ethics and each of these Boards will have lists of contacts with whom you can discuss your study if appropriate. For social science research the ethical procedure may be less onerous but this can not be done as a 'tick box' form to be completed and then forgotten. The potential for doing harm within an enquiry through omission or commission is very real. The researcher is in a position of power and as such must take responsibility for their actions as within any psychological interaction. You must leave the lightest of foot prints within the world of the client or participant.

3) Process – the Research Activity itself

In effect the research activity starts at the point where you first consider the structuring of your research question. It is therefore pivotally important that a research diary is kept from that point to capture the work that is done as it is done. An analogy is with the lab book of the clinical or natural scientist – the place where all the work on data collection, interpretation and analysis is stored.

Research is by its very nature problematic and unpredictable. This can be difficult to handle within a research environment but as a practitioner researcher you may not have the flexibility to respond as you may wish. Issues such as resource management may intercede and stop the full fulfilment of your research aims. Bounded rationality is a concept which warns us that as researchers we will, at times, need to be content with the sufficient and not the optimum which we originally designed. If faced with a substantial rethink then use of critical friends and any external stakeholders can again be pivotal at the redesign stage.

There will be a time when your research activity has provided you with data which you can then analyse and interpret. At this point it is useful to consider the following:

Data are not information. Information is data endowed with relevance and purpose. Knowledge is information endowed with application. Wisdom is knowledge endowed with age and experience.

Davenport, 2002 (p. 10).

Therefore although as researchers we may be shy of disseminating our results it is only through sharing our experience and the outputs that our data becomes knowledge.

If knowledge is information endowed with application our concern as practitioners might lie with the forms of knowledge we are trying to describe. Recently it has been argued that we can view knowledge as being of four main types (Scott et al. (2004)):

- Type 1: Disciplinary Knowledge. Scientific description is seen as the superior form of knowledge and the only possible way of seeing the world... The practice setting may be a source of data but knowledge is valued for its own sake not for its application. This type of knowledge rarely forms part of practitioner based research
- Type 2: Technical Rationality. The practitioners are required to divest themselves of their practice knowledge in favour of knowledge that transcends their local and particular knowledge. This framework supports the idea of evidence-based practice in that the concern is not to understand the political, ethical or consequential contexts for work but rather 'what works'. The emphasis is on efficiency not knowledge for its own sake. This does form the type of research which is asked of practitioners particularly in relation to evaluating therapies.
- Type 3: Dispositional and Transdisciplinary Knowledge. This is based on the assumption that knowledge is non-predictable, non-determinist and

contextualized. Practice is a deliberative action concerned with making appropriate decisions about practical problems in specific situations. The emphasis is on knowledge developed by the individual through reflection on practice. This is often favoured by practitioners and can lead to much improved local services as it address local issues.

- Type 4: Critical Knowledge. This is based on the critique of existing forms of knowledge. Its purpose is explicitly political and the emphasis is on change. Individuals are seen to be positioned within discursive and institutional structures which influence how they understand themselves and others. Critiques of that understanding are encouraged and there is an attempt to undermine the conventional knowledge discourses with which both scientists and practitioners work. This is rarely attempted but can form a serious basis for critiquing our endeavours, unfortunately such critiques often appear from service users or outside the profession rather than from within it.

Type1 is seen as lying within the domain of the academic/university based researcher, but other types may represent a contribution to knowledge from practice i.e. how you can achieve impact for your research. Achieving impact in the world takes place through workshops, reports to sponsors, conferences, community of practice, changes to practice and policy and yes though publishing and that is the subject of the next chapter!

Going forward:

There is the potential for the university based world of science and the work based world of applied practice to collaborate thus breaking down the science-practice divide. Universities are now acknowledging that knowledge is produced not only by them but by the world of practice and they have a role in recognising and accrediting that knowledge. Garnett (2004) has identified key contributions that university/work-based partnerships can make to building intellectual capital within work-based projects including exploring the nature and implications of the apparent lineage between work-based learning, knowledge creation, organizational decision-making and bounded rationality.

The partnership between the work place (practice) and the university (science) provides a powerful resource to overcome the research-practice divide. Thus practitioner led research can be about impact not simply about originality. It has value in its own right not as a poor relation to academically driven research.

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